

# Horse owners urged to make sure vaccinations are up to date

*West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis both spread by mosquitoes*

DOVER – Delaware horse owners are being advised to make certain their equines' vaccinations are current to protect against the threat of two potentially fatal diseases.

Unvaccinated horses suffer most severely from both West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis, which are spread by infected mosquitoes and can be fatal, said Delaware State Veterinarian Dr. Heather Hirst, who heads the Delaware Department of Agriculture's Poultry and Animal Health Section.

"Vaccination is a simple and cost-effective way of preventing these diseases – far cheaper than treating them," Hirst said. "Horse owners should take full precautions to keep their horses safe, and be on the alert for signs of infection."

Both horses and humans can contract WNV and EEE if bitten by a mosquito carrying the virus, but it is important to note that the viruses cannot be transmitted between horses or from horses to people. The viruses normally exist in a cycle between mosquitoes and birds, but occasionally EEE can be transmitted from mosquitoes to mammals. There have been no confirmed equine cases of EEE or WNV from 2014-2016.

The Mosquito Control Section of the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control monitors for both diseases statewide. DNREC treats wooded wetlands near populated areas in all three counties, as well as many other types of mosquito-producing habitats.

Hirst said horse owners should contact their veterinarian immediately if they suspect their horse may be showing signs of WNV or EEE, which both may include fever (though not always with WNV), anorexia, head pressing, depression or personality change, wobbling or staggering, weakness, blindness, convulsions, muscle spasms in the head and neck, or hind-limb weakness.

Owners should consult with their veterinarians about the WNV and EEE vaccinations, as well as vaccinations for herpesvirus (rhinopneumonitis), influenza, rabies and tetanus, among others, Hirst said.

Horse owners can also help during mosquito season by keeping horses inside during dawn and dusk, which are peak mosquito times, and using topical insect repellents labeled for use on horses, Hirst said.

DNREC's Mosquito Control Section asks the public's help in monitoring for the presence of WNV by reporting sick or dead wild birds of certain species that may have contracted the virus. Sick or dead crows, blue jays, cardinals, robins, hawks or owls, and clusters of five or more sick or dead wild birds of any species, should be reported to Mosquito Control's two offices: Glasgow, for northern Kent County (including Dover) and New Castle County, (302) 836-2555; or Milford, for southern Kent County and Sussex County, (302) 422-1512. Bird specimens should have been dead for less than 24 hours and not appear to have died or been killed by other obvious causes.

For more information about WNV or EEE:

- Human health questions should be directed to the Delaware Division of Public Health, (888) 295-5156, or (302) 744-4990.
- Animal health questions should be directed to the Delaware Department of Agriculture at (800) 282-8685 (Delaware only) or (302) 698-4500. Ask for the Poultry and Animal Health Section.

- Questions about the state's mosquito control program or mosquito biology should be directed to the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's Mosquito Control Section at (302) 739-9917.

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